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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000567

SIPDIS

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USAID/DCHA/FFP ALSO FOR WHAMMINCK, JDWORKEN, TANDERSON, LPETERSON, SGILBERT;
USAID/DCHA/OFDA ALSO FOR CPRATT, KLUU, GGOTTLIEB, AFERRARA;
USAID/AFR ALSO FOR ELOKEN, LDOBBINS;
PRETORIA ALSO FOR USAID PDISKIN, JWESSEL, HHALE, NMANGQALAZA;
DEPT ALSO FOR AF/S;
ROME FOR USUN

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: LESOTHO: RENEWAL OF FOOD INSECURITY DISASTER DECLARATION

REF: Maseru 403

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[1](#)1. This is an action cable. See paragraphs 2 and 7 below.

[1](#)2. SUMMARY: On July 10, Charge issued a food insecurity disaster declaration following a severe decline in Lesotho's agricultural production as a result of drought conditions affecting the southern African region. Lesotho will require additional humanitarian assistance to meet critical relief needs and to assist with post-drought recovery in FY 2008. For this reason, the Ambassador hereby renews the referenced disaster declaration for FY 2008 and looks forward to working with USAID's Regional Office of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) and Regional Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) on enacting effective humanitarian interventions in the Mountain Kingdom. END SUMMARY.

Background

[1](#)3. According to a variety of food experts, Lesotho government officials, and official observers -- including USAID, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the GOL's Disaster Management Authority, and local and international NGO communities -- persistent drought and failed crops since December 2006 and subsequent hikes in commodity prices have created an increasingly acute food crisis in Lesotho. The Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC), in a report drafted in July 2007, increased their estimated population of people with "missing food entitlements" from 400,000 to 553,000 out of a population of 1.88 million. According to a USAID assessment, the risks of acute malnutrition ("wasting") are higher this year due to: (1) the cumulative effects of six consecutive poor harvests; (2) the fact that this year's harvest has been the worst in many years; and (3) a spike in maize prices (more than double last year's prices) which makes it difficult for vulnerable households to compensate for their harvest failure with market purchases.

USG Humanitarian Assistance

[1](#)4. On June 11, the U.S. Embassy announced a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) donation to the World Food Programme (WFP) of 6,500 metric tons of food

commodities, valued at \$5 million, to help meet the critical food needs of rural households. This assistance included approximately 4,100 metric tons of maize meal, 2,000 metric tons of peas, 300 metric tons of vegetable oil and 100 metric tons of corn-soy blend. On July 10, the U.S. Embassy announced an additional USAID donation to WFP of 3,750 metric tons of food aid for Lesotho, valued at \$2.93 million. This assistance included 3,000 metric tons of cornmeal and 750 metric tons of pinto beans.

¶5. In addition, USAID extended by nine months a "food-for-assets" aid program administered by the C-SAFE consortium (World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and CARE), providing an additional 5,300 metric tons of commodities, valued at over \$6 million, to those in need in Lesotho. These three major donations brought the total amount of supplemental food aid pledged by the United States Government in response to the current crisis in Lesotho to 15,500 metric tons, valued at \$13.93 million.

¶6. USAID also is also supporting World Vision's "Lesotho Community Seed Aid Project" aimed at preventing famine in upcoming seasons. The approximate value of the project is \$550,000. USAID also approved a C-SAFE program for small dam rehabilitation and improved irrigation in Lesotho valued at \$400,000.

Renewal of Disaster Declaration for FY 2008

¶7. Given the widespread impact and duration of the ongoing drought and food security crisis, the nation's food shortfall may worsen before it improves. Rains returned to Lesotho in October, but the prospects for the imminent planting season are entirely uncertain. As such, Embassy Maseru hereby renews its referenced disaster declaration for fiscal year 2008. Post will continue to monitor the situation and determine what additional humanitarian assistance would benefit Lesotho's vulnerable

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populations, including the use of the \$50,000 authorization from USAID/OFDA for urgent needs, possibly in the field of nutritional surveillance.
NOLAN